Book Reviews


This happy little book of cartoons, which presents on each page a law maxim in both Latin and English, illustrated by a humorous cartoon in which the maxim is appliqued, with dialogue balloons or a punch line, is an interesting and amusing trifle. The drawings are of professional quality; the situations are amusing without being uproarious, and some are unashamedly based on stock quips. Only one cartoon is in color, and none are really off-color. A few of the cartoons are simply foils for outrageous puns, but most of them contain other elements of humor. They are law-related, at least to the level of J.P. court, and a number depict trial court scenes. An occasional cartoon invites the lawyer-viewer to ponder the problem, as where the “nut” who denies that he is Napoleon is shown by the lie detector to be lying.

Chief Justice Arthur T. Vanderbilt, in a brief Foreword, aptly praises the book as “genial,” and whimsically suggests several valuable courtroom uses for it. The book is not seriously intended as a sugarcoated way of learning Latin maxims, but a careless reader might find that he had brushed up on a few Latin words while enjoying the book.

The author, who describes himself simply as having spent 30 years in practicing law and sitting on the bench, is Village Judge of the Village of Pelham Manor, and Town Justice of the Town of Pelham, both in New York, and is an ex-President of the New York State Association of Magistrates. Becoming a lawyer despite a frustrated desire to be an artist, he sublimated by drawing these panels, originally published under the heading “Illustrated Legal Maxims” in Justice Court Topics, a publication of the New York State Association of Towns.

Each viewer will have his own favorite or favorites, but the following example is fairly representative:

1. 149 cartoons, only three of which have more than a single panel.
2. “Applied” is an understatement.
3. P. 77.
4. E.g. “Raise up Sir Lowquitter” (P. 71). The thing speaks for itself! Cf. p. 59 (man found under bus was not a total stranger—his arms and legs were missing).
5. P. 36.
6. Some of the most useful maxims are missing, their places usurped by maxims rarely encountered. Several maxims are repeated (i.e. “Abundans Cautela Non Nocet” is variously illustrated on Pp. 15, 83, 86, 132; and some ten others are illustrated twice each.) Occasionally the author fails to supply any Latin. Pp. 5, 55, 112, 138; cf. pp. 46, 104.
It Behooves all Good men to Avoid Suspicion.

(Omnes Bonos Accusare Addocet Suspicionem).

Being married to one woman too many doesn’t always involve bigamy! ! !

The appearance of this book reminds us that American law students have available to them many excellent books in which the stuff of their profession is presented for leisure-time reading in varying shades of levity mixed with learning. Other legal writers who have essayed light treatment of legal maxims include William R. Anson, author of Anson on Contracts, whose privately printed Ballads en Terms de la Ley appeared in 1914, and Yale law professor William Frederic Foster, whose Latin Maxims of Anglo-Saxon Law Compiled and Translated Into English Verse was published in New Haven in 1924.
Possibly the best known cartoon treatment of odd American laws is that of O. Soglow,⁸ which the serious student may enjoy even more by classifying the depicted items under one of several general headings (e.g. formerly sensible laws, ridiculous because now obsolete; laws reasonable in themselves but enacted with so little imagination as to be ridiculously limited in scope; laws seemingly capricious but designed to remedy or avoid a discernible recognized or fancied danger).

Arthur Train's famous Mr. Tutt usually presented in breezy short story form the application of some archaic, obscure, or overlooked legal principle.⁹ Irvin S. Cobb's Old Judge Priest was a similar, more folksy collection, less given to turning on some narrow legal technicality.¹⁰

Various volumes are devoted to preserving the wit and anecdotes of lawyers of a particular state,¹¹ and books devoted to humorous or unusual wills occupy a sizable niche of their own.¹²

Two volumes giving serious but good-humoured legal answers to various hypothetical situations portrayed deserve special mention,¹³ as does the anthology

8. IN RICHARD HYMAN'S IT'S AGAINST THE LAW! (New York, 1949) and LOONEY LAWS (New York, 1947).
9. See Review, 24 Ore. L. Rev. 223 (1945) (citing several Mr. Tutt volumes, and other reviews).
which is currently the best known volume of American legal humor.\textsuperscript{14}

The American law student has access also to a treasury of British legal humor. Without comparing the merits of the two, one may safely observe that some of the legal humor written in England requires from its readers considerable legal and literary learning. Several English humorists have dealt with cases actually reported,\textsuperscript{15} or have written enchanting opinions in cases either wholly imaginary,\textsuperscript{16} or extracted from Shakespeare,\textsuperscript{17} the classics,\textsuperscript{18} or other familiar sources.\textsuperscript{19} Blackstone's Commentaries have not been entirely overlooked.\textsuperscript{20} Even after excluding Gilbert and Sullivan, works in the field of general literature,\textsuperscript{21} and volumes of legal biography, personal reminiscences, and straight legal essays, the student can find many English writers who have devoted their

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attention to interesting legal quirks and oddities\textsuperscript{22} or legal anecdotes.\textsuperscript{23}

The foregoing representative canvass is necessarily selective, both among items of a given category and as among different categories. It sought to survey the books of legal humor, exclusive of out and out gag books.\textsuperscript{24}

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